

Message Text

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PAGE 01 OTTAWA 01695 01 OF 02 172349Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
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R 172334Z MAR 77
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 OTTAWA 01695

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TAGS: ETEL, PINT, CA
SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION OF CBC'S ALLEGED PRO-SEPARATISM

REF: OTTAWA 1472

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. CRTC HAS ESTABLISHED COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY HEADED BY CHAIRMAN BOYLE TO INVESTIGATE CBC. INQUIRY WILL GO BEYOND NARROW QUESTION OF SEPARATIST BIAS AND DEAL WITH CBC'S TOTAL PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROGRAMMING IN RELATION TO OBJECTIVES OF GOVERNING LEGISLATION. BOYLE HAS ASKED COMPLAINANTS TO SUBMIT SPECIFIC EVIDENCE OF BIAS. TRUDEAU REPORTEDLY WILL NOT DO SO. REPORT DUE BY JULY 1 UNLIKELY COME TO FIRM CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SEPARATIST BIAS BUT MAY BE FOLLOWED BY MORE EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION AS CRTC CONTINUES TO PURSUE LONG-STANDING EFFORTS TO EXERCISE AUTHORITY OVER PUBLIC SECTOR OF BROADCASTING INDUSTRY. END SUMMARY.

2. CANADIAN RADIO-TELEVISION AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION (CRTC) HAS ESTABLISHED A FORMAL "COMMITTEE OF INQUIRY INTO THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING SERVICE" TO
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PAGE 02 OTTAWA 01695 01 OF 02 172349Z

CONDUCT PUBLIC INQUIRY, REQUESTED LAST WEEK BY PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU, INTO HOW WELL CBC IS FULFILLING ITS MANDATE. CRTC CHAIRMAN HARRY BOYLE HIMSELF WILL PRESIDE OVER THE COMMITTEE WHICH WILL BE COMPOSED OF NINE PART-TIME MEMBERS OF THE COMMISSION, AS WELL AS OTHER CANADIANS YET TO BE NAMED. THE COMMITTEE WILL EXAMINE REPRESENTATIONS FROM THE PUBLIC, INTERVIEW

THE CBC AND THE PUBLIC, UNDERTAKE RESEARCH, AND MAY ALSO "SELECTIVELY ANALYZE" PARTICULAR PROGRAMS. CRTC'S MARCH 14 ANNOUNCEMENT ASSERTED INQUIRY WOULD BE BASED ON SECTION 15 OF BROADCASTING ACT WHICH DEFINES CRTC'S ROLE AS "TO REGULATE AND SUPERVISE ALL ASPECTS OF THE CANADIAN BROADCASTING SYSTEM WITH A VIEW TO IMPLEMENTING THE BROADCASTING POLICY ENUNCIATED IN SECTION 3 OF THE ACT". IT QUOTES IN FULL LENGTHY STATEMENT OF BROADCASTING POLICY CONTAINED IN SECTION 3. IN CONDUCTING INQUIRY CRTC PLEDGED THAT IT WILL SAFEGUARD SUCH BASIC PRINCIPLES AS FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AND COMPETENCE, NON-DISCRIMINATION, AND PUBLIC BROADCASTING IN CANADA. ANNOUNCEMENT EXTENDED A BROAD INVITATION TO THE PUBLIC TO SUBMIT BY APRIL 15 WRITTEN INFORMATION AND COMMENT RELEVANT TO ASSESSING HOW THE CBC CARRIES OUT ITS MANDATE.

3. IN A NINETY-MINUTE PRESS CONFERENCE (WHICH RECEIVED EXTENSIVE BUT NOT DETAILED COVERAGE), CHAIRMAN BOYLE CALLED ON CRITICAL POLITICIANS AND THE PUBLIC TO BE SPECIFIC IN THEIR COMPLAINTS. HE NOTED THAT THE CRTC HAD NOT RECEIVED A SINGLE DETAILED COMPLAINT ABOUT PRO-SEPARATISM BIAS, ALTHOUGH NUMEROUS FEDERAL LIBERALS SAY THEY HAVE RECEIVED HUNDREDS. INDEED, ONLY FIVE LETTERS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED IN THE PAST WEEK AND OF THE 222 COMPLAINTS ABOUT CBC RECEIVED BY CRTC SINCE SEPTEMBER 1976, NONE HAVE DEALT SPECIFICALLY WITH BIAS. BOYLE DID NOT MAKE CLEAR WHETHER PUBLIC HEARINGS WILL BE HELD, SAYING SIMPLY THAT THE COMMITTEE ITSELF DOES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 OTTAWA 01695 01 OF 02 172349Z

NOT HAVE THIS POWER BUT MAY RECOMMEND TO THE FULL CRTC THAT SUCH HEARINGS BE HELD. LIKEWISE, THE COMMITTEE ITSELF WOULD DECIDE WHETHER ITS MEETINGS WOULD BE OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

4. BOYLE IN HIS PRESS CONFERENCE ALSO LAID THE GROUND FOR A LENGTHIER EXAMINATION OF THE CBC THAN WOULD BE POSSIBLE WITHIN THE JULY 1 DEADLINE FOR A REPORT. HE SUGGESTED THE COMMITTEE MIGHT RECOMMEND A NEW ROYAL COMMISSION ON BROADCASTING (THE LAST ONE REPORTED IN 1965) OR AN EXPANSION OF HEARINGS THE CRTC PLANS FOR THE FALL OF 1977 ON "FAIR AND BALANCED PROGRAMMING". HE STATED CRTC WAS NOT GOING INTO A SPECIAL INVESTIGATION OF THE FRENCH NETWORK ALONE; PRO-SEPARATISM QUESTION SHOULD BE LOOKED AT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BROADER AND WIDESPREAD CRITICISM OF CBC PREVALENT IN THE COUNTRY.

5. PRESIDENT A.M. JOHNSON IN MARCH 15 STATEMENT SAID CBC ACCEPTED THE INQUIRY BUT WAS CONCERNED OVER ITS

PRECISE OBJECTIVES AND HOW IT WILL BE CONDUCTED;
NOTED THAT SPECIFIC ALLEGATIONS OF BIAS AND IMBALANCE
CAN BE JUDGED ONLY IN CONTEXT OF TOTALITY OF PROGRAMS;
AND SUGGESTED THE MOST THAT CAN BE EXPECTED FROM COMMITTEE
MIGHT BE A "COMPILATION OF PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS" WHICH
WOULD BE USEFUL TO THE CBC AS IT PREPARED FOR 1979
FORMAL HEARINGS ON LICENSE RENEWALS. STATEMENT WELCOMED
FACT THAT BOYLE (A FORMER CBC OFFICIAL) WILL PRESIDE
OVER INQUIRY. COVERAGE OF JOHNSON PRESS CONFERENCE
REPORTS HIS CONFIDENCE INQUIRY WOULD NOT SUPPORT
"SWEEPING ALLEGATIONS OF PRO-SEPARATIST BIAS"; THAT HE

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PAGE 01 OTTAWA 01695 02 OF 02 172357Z
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 OTTAWA 01695

FOUND SUCH ALLEGATIONS QUITE "DISTASTEFUL". JOHNSON
REPORTEDLY SAID HE WOULD RESIGN RATHER THAN GIVE IN TO
POLITICAL PRESSURE OVER ALLEGED BIAS, BUT ALSO THAT IF
SUCH BIAS WERE FOUND HE WOULD TAKE THE CONCLUSIONS
VERY SERIOUSLY. (NOTE: THERE HAS BEEN PRESS COMMENTARY
SUGGESTING THAT JOHNSON SHOULD HAVE RESISTED THIS
INQUIRY AND IMPLYING THAT HE SHOULD RESIGN RATHER THAN
ACCEPT IT.)

6. PRESS ALSO REPORTS UNIONS REPRESENTING CBC EMPLOYEE
GROUPS (CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC EMPLOYEES AND NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTING EMPLOYEES AND TECHNICIANS)
ARE ATTACKING INQUIRY AS INTERFERENCE WITH FREEDOM OF
SPEECH, AND IN THE CASE OF CUPE COMPARING IT TO
"MCCARTHYISM".

7. COMMENT: THE BROADCASTING ACT OF 1968 IS A PECULIAR HYBRID IN THAT IT CONTAINS THE CHARTERS OF BOTH THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING SYSTEM AND THE REGULATORY AUTHORITY. LATTER CLEARLY GOVERNS PRIVATE BROADCASTING BUT HAS A LESS CLEAR RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC SECTOR. SINCE ITS CREATION THE CRTC, PARTICULARLY UNDER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 OTTAWA 01695 02 OF 02 172357Z

PREVIOUS CHAIRMAN PIERRE JUNEAU, HAS ASPIRED TO A SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY OVER CBC WHICH LATTER HAS STRONGLY RESISTED. IN A 1974 DECISION, "RADIO FREQUENCIES ARE PUBLIC PROPERTY", TECHNICALLY INVOLVING ONLY THE LIMITED ISSUE OF LICENSE RENEWALS, THE CRTC ATTEMPTED WITH SOME SUCCESS TO SECURE CHANGES IN CBC FINANCING AND TO A LESSER EXTENT TO IMPOSE GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT (SEE OTTAWA A-382, JULY 31, 1974 AND A-305, MAY 14, 1975). POLITICALLY SITUATION IS COMPLICATED BY FACT THAT COMMUNICATIONS MINISTER (SAUVE) IS RESPONSIBLE TO PARLIAMENT FOR CRTC WHILE SECRETARY OF STATE (ROBERTS) IS RESPONSIBLE FOR CBC. IT APPEARS THAT THIS INQUIRY WILL GIVE CRTC, AND MME. SAUVE, AN OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE THEIR INFLUENCE OVER CBC.

8. IN A MARCH 15 CONVERSATION WITH TCO, CHAIRMAN BOYLE ADMITTED CONNECTION BETWEEN THE 1974 DECISION AND PRESENT EFFORT. BOYLE REMARKED THAT IF CBC HAD DONE ALL THAT CRTC HAD EARLIER RECOMMENDED PROBLEM OF CURRENT ALLEGATIONS WOULD NOT EXIST. HE CONFIRMED HIS INTENTION TO DEAL WITH SEPARATISM QUESTION (WHICH HE SEEMED TO REGARD AS ONLY SMALL PART OF ISSUE) IN CONTEXT OF BROADER INQUIRY. HE ASSERTED THAT ANALOGOUS INVESTIGATIONS INTO PUBLIC BROADCASTING HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED IN RECENT YEARS IN SOME 15 COUNTRIES (INCLUDING U.K., AUSTRALIA, SWEDEN). BASIC PROBLEM, BOYLE STATED, IS THAT ELECTRONIC MEDIA ARE FORCED BY TIME CONSTRAINTS TO GREATLY COMPRESS EXPRESSION OF IDEAS AND VALUES AND THIS CAUSES DISCONTENT AMONG POLITICIANS, CHURCH GROUPS, AND INTELLECTUALS WHO CHARGE THAT NECESSARILY SELECTIVE COVERAGE IS SLANTED.

9. BOYLE WAS DUBIOUS THAT INVESTIGATION OF TYPE HE THINKS NECESSARY INVOLVING BOTH ENGLISH AND FRENCH SERVICES OF CBC, COULD BE PROPERLY COMPLETED BY JULY 1, THUS HE REGARDS PRESENT EFFORT AS STAGE-SETTER FOR MORE EXTENSIVE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 OTTAWA 01695 02 OF 02 172357Z

STUDY IN FUTURE. (IN A SIMILAR VEIN A CRTC EXECUTIVE TOLD TCO THE JULY 1 REPORT WOULD BE VERY SUPERFICIAL AND THE REAL MEAT WOULD NOT EMERGE UNTIL AFTER PUBLIC HEARINGS WHICH HE EXPECTED WOULD START SEPTEMBER 15 AND DEAL WITH MUCH MORE THAN SEPARATISM.)

10. IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL THAT POLITICIANS WHO HAVE BEEN AIRING CHARGES OF BIAS IN CBC FRENCH SERVICE WILL BE ABLE TO PROVIDE BOYLE WITH MUCH OF THE SORT OF DOCUMENTED EVIDENCE HE HAS REQUESTED. (TRUDEAU'S OFFICE REPORTEDLY HAS TOLD PRESS PM WILL NOT PERSONALLY SUBMIT ANY EVIDENCE TO INQUIRY.) GIVEN BOYLE'S APPROACH, BEST BET IS THAT REPORT DUE BY JULY 1 WILL NOT COME TO ANY FIRM CONCLUSIONS ABOUT SEPARATIST BIAS. PERHAPS, HOWEVER, FACT THAT FRENCH SERVICES ARE UNDER PUBLIC SCRUTINY MAY IN ITSELF INHIBIT ANY TENDENCIES THAT MIGHT OTHERWISE EXIST IN CBC TOWARD EXPRESSION OF SEPARATIST LEANINGS.

11. COPIES OF MARCH 14 ANNOUNCEMENT BEING POUCHED TO EUR/CAN (BLAKEMORE), EB/TT/TD (ANDERSON) AND FCC (JOHNSON). ENDERS

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Message Attributes

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